

# INTERNET TOOLS for Planning, Conservation & Environmental Protection

In an effort to increase awareness of web-based resources available to local governments and citizen planners, the Wisconsin Department of Natural Resources (WDNR) has initiated a technical assistance program focused on Internet tools for planning, conservation, and environmental protection. This program has been made possible by a water quality management grant awarded to the WDNR by the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA).

As part of our technical assistance program we are writing articles that highlight an Internet tool, discuss its possible uses, and offer step-by-step tutorials. It is our hope that the information provided here will insure that all involved in local planning processes have equal access to valuable information and analysis tools. Gaining access to these free web-based planning tools will assist communities with preliminary selection of alternative approaches to watershed and community planning. When community planners, developers, and citizens have access to similar information they are more readily able to interact and jointly discover possible solutions to land use issues.

Additional articles can be found online at <http://dnr.wi.gov/org/es/science/landuse/CompTools/local.htm>

## Internet Tools for Finding and Accessing Data

Internet tools for finding and accessing data give users access to a wide range of shared information. Many of the tools in this category serve as portals allowing users the ability to obtain demographic, geographic, environmental, and other data from multiple sources across the Internet. These portals give the user the ability to create a more comprehensive picture of their local community.

Federal, local, and state agencies invest significant resources collecting and managing data, much of which has value for local environmental protection and management efforts. Internet tools for finding and accessing data allow anyone involved or interested in your community's land use decisions access to scientifically based information. The information holdings of agencies can include a broad range of data types in a variety of formats. Internet

tools organize, catalog, and make these resources accessible, often in downloadable or online formats.

Tools for finding and accessing data can be static websites or searchable databases. Some focus only on a single dataset or data source (e.g., data from a particular land use study) or only on information related to a specific resource (e.g., endangered and threatened species or historical resources). Other data tools serve more as a clearinghouse, providing access to a variety of datasets and information sources. Some tools guide users by letting them know how and where to find information rather than actually providing the information.

## Window to My Environment

One tool for finding and accessing data, Window to My Environment (WME), is sponsored by EPA. Developed in partnership with federal, state, tribal, and local governments, this tool provides even the novice computer user with a wealth of information. WME is part of a suite of EPA tools that have won numerous awards during its development.

WME, using a map of your community, is an entry-point to EPA databases. It improves access to useful community-based environmental information and lends support to community-based decision making. As with all the tools we promote with our technical assistance program, the only necessary software is a web browser; meaning, if you have Internet access you can acquire this information now, without any cost.

Users of WME can obtain information about their area's environmental conditions, such as air and water quality, by accessing data from federal and state monitoring sites. Abundant information on activities occurring in your local watershed is available including information on Superfund sites, toxic releases, water discharge, air emissions, hazardous waste locations, and demographics. Numerous reports on the physical and chemical characteristics of impaired water bodies can be obtained. WME is basically a bottomless portal to federal, state, tribal, and local resources along with links to other organizations at work in the queried watershed.

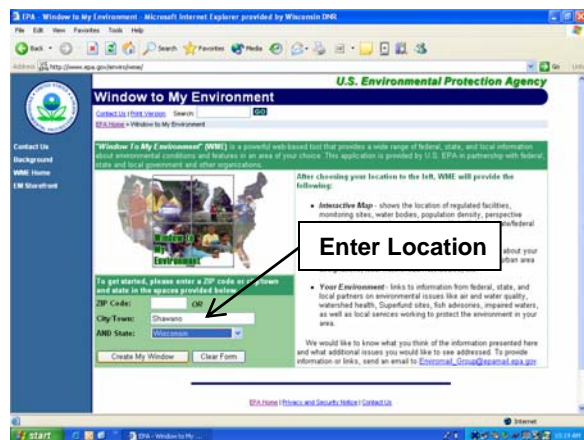
WME gives you the ability to navigate your way through any watershed using traditional visual landmarks including highways and streets. All of the

available features can be overlaid onto an aerial photo, topographic map, or shaded relief background. WME requires only a few simple steps to get started.

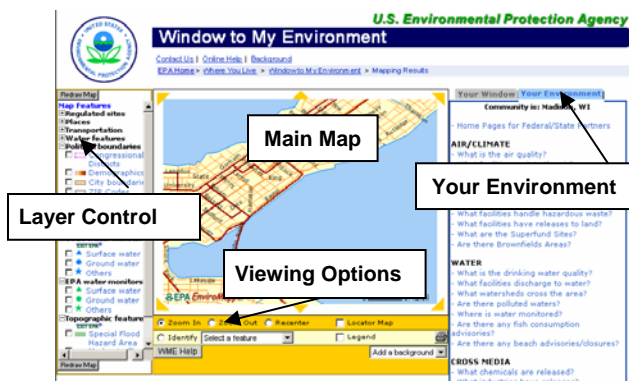
## How to Access WME

1. Using your Internet browser, go to [www.epa.gov/enviro/wme/](http://www.epa.gov/enviro/wme/)

Enter your zip code or city and state in the fields located in the lower left of the page. Click “Create My Window.”



2. Your Window will be created displaying the basic spatial data for the area entered in step 1. Below is a view of the window.



The **Layer Control** allows you to turn the visible map elements on and off (e.g., roads, impaired waters, counties). These are controlled by checking or unchecking the box associated with the element and then clicking “Redraw Map.”

The **Viewing Options** allow you to change and navigate the map displayed by zooming in and out, panning, and recentering.

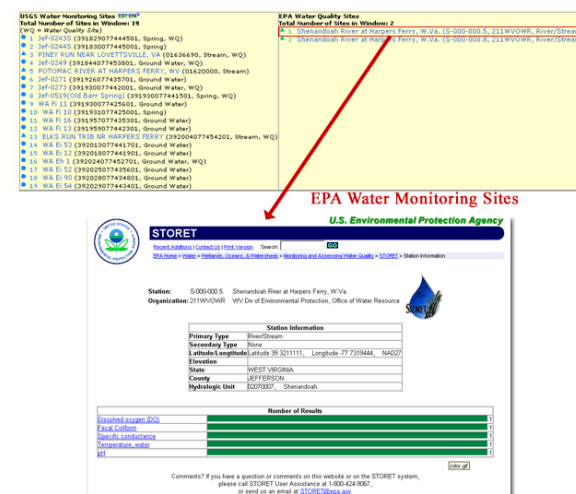
**Your Environment** provides a series of useful guidance questions to help you learn more about your community and watershed.

## An Example Using WME

### Accessing EPA Water Monitoring Reports

Select EPA Water Monitor layers in the Layer Control Area then click “Redraw Map.” The Reports available for the visible area are then displayed as links in area below the map.

Click on monitor listing to bring up EPA’s STORET data. STORET (short for STORage and RETrieval) is a repository of water quality, biological, and physical data. It is used by state environmental agencies, EPA, and other federal agencies, universities, and private citizens.



Explore WME by navigating your way through the many available links. WME provides information that may prove useful in your local community.

## For More Information:

WDNR’s land use website  
[www.dnr.state.wi.us/org/es/science/landuse](http://www.dnr.state.wi.us/org/es/science/landuse)



[www.epa.gov/waterspace](http://www.epa.gov/waterspace)



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